



Japan

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 145,884 square miles, and its population is an estimated 127.4 million. It is difficult to determine accurately the percentages of adherents of different religions. While academics estimate that 20 to 30 percent of adults actively practice a particular faith, the Agency for Cultural Affairs reported in 2003 that 213,826,700 citizens claimed a religion. These numbers are nearly twice Japan's population, since many people claim affiliation with multiple religious organizations, particularly Shintoism and Buddhism. Furthermore, membership statistics kept by the agency are based on self-reports from various religious organizations.

Of citizens claiming a faith, 50.3 percent adhered to Shintoism, 44 percent to Buddhism, 4.7 percent to "other," and 1 percent to Christianity. Shintoism and Buddhism are not mutually exclusive and most Shinto and Buddhist believers follow both faiths. "Other" faiths include "international" religions, such as the Unification Church, as well as faiths founded in the country, such as Tenrikyo, Seichounoie, Sekai Kyusei Kyo, and Perfect Liberty. A small segment of the population, predominantly among foreign-born residents, attends Jewish or Islamic services. The Japanese Muslim Association reports there are roughly 100,000 Muslims in the country of whom 10,000 are citizens.

Under the 1951 Religious Corporation Law, the Government recognizes 28 schools of Buddhism. The major Buddhist schools are Tendai, Shingon, Jodo, Zen (Soto and Rinzai sects), Nichiren, and Nara. In addition to traditional Buddhist orders, there are a number of Buddhist lay organizations, one of the largest being Soka Gakkai, which reports having over 8 million members in the country. The three main schools of Shintoism are Jinja, Kyoha, and Shinkyoha. Catholic and Protestant denominations have modest followings.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

A 1996 amendment to the Religious Corporation Law gives the authorities increased oversight of religious groups and requires greater disclosure of financial assets by religious corporations.

The Government does not require religious groups to register or be licensed; however, to receive official recognition as a religious organization, which brings tax benefits and other advantages, a group must register as a "religious corporation." In practice, almost all religious groups register. The Agency for Cultural Affairs listed 183,394 registered religious groups as of December 2003.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

In 2002, the courts declared "deprogramming" illegal in a case involving members of Jehovah's Witnesses. However, in 2003, the Supreme Court rejected the Unification Church's appeal in a case involving charges against the victim's family and the kidnappers for kidnapping and "deprogramming." In that case, the court determined that the bases of the appeal were not matters involving a violation of the Constitution. A Unification Church spokesman estimated there were 20 deprogramming cases during the period covered by this report; however, at the families' request, none of the cases were reported to the police.

According to a spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses, members are free to practice their religion without restriction. Other than one forced confinement in January 2005, which was reported to the police after the fact, there have been no reported deprogramming cases since 2003.

There are no known restrictions on proselytizing.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights, including the promotion of religious freedom internationally. The U.S. Embassy maintains periodic contact with representatives of religious organizations.

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